

EQUIPPED FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Ephesians 4:1-16

Key Verse: 4:12, “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

Are you thankful for your church leaders? Maybe you’re thinking, “That depends on who you are talking about.” Here’s another question: How have you been equipped for the Lord’s work? Or, how are you equipping others to serve the Lord? This is our third special message on spiritual gifting in the church. Today we want to think about how Christ has gifted the church, and how and why we all are being equipped to serve the Lord and his people. May God bless our brief study of this part of Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesian Christians.

First, let’s do a brief overview of some key points in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians thus far. In chapter 1 Paul expounded so many blessings that Christians have received. What are these blessings? In Christ, we are chosen, holy, blameless, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven. In him, we have an inheritance, hope and the promised Holy Spirit. All this to the praise of his glory!

In chapter 2, Paul said we were all dead in our trespasses and sins as children of disobedience, destined for judgement. But God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ by his grace. He raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. Paul wrote (listen to this): “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8-10). Christ Jesus has brought Jews and Gentiles who believe in him together, into one body, one temple in the Lord.

In chapter 3, Paul declared the mystery that the Gentiles are fellow heirs of God with Israel, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Paul ended the chapter with a prayer for these Christians to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and to be filled with all the fullness of God. And Paul praised God, “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (3:21)

Chapter 4 begins the practical application of the letter: how to live as Christians, in view of all these blessings. Paul begins in verse 1, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” Paul

was in prison for Christ. He urges Christians to live worthy lives. How then can we Christians live in a manner worthy of our calling?

Paul gives us some words how to do this in verses 2-3: "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Paul urges us Christians to be humble, gentle, patient and to bear one another in love. He tells us to eagerly seek unity and peace. Our human nature is often to do the opposite of this: to be proud, harsh, impatient, rude, contentious, divisive and to make trouble instead of peace. We need the help of the Holy Spirit. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Galatians 5:22-23a tells us: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..."

One major theme in Paul's letter to the Ephesians is the theme of unity. God united Jews and Gentiles in Christ into one body. Paul picks up on this theme again in verses 4-6: "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. What word did Paul repeat here? One. Not two. Not many. But one. We who are many make one people of God. One body. One temple. One church. Christians are one in Jesus Christ. We are in one family of God. This reminds me of a rowing team. They row as one [photo]. One person faces the rowers to keep the beat. The others row together in unison. If one rower did their own thing on their own timing, that person would ruin the race for the whole boat.

Now look at verse 7. "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." As we have already learned in our spiritual gift series, we have all been given grace from Jesus, and we have all been given at least one gift to serve the body of Christ. We are many, but we serve one body, the body of Christ. We need each other and we belong to each other.

In verses 8-10, Paul interprets Psalm 68:18 in view of Christ. He writes, "Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)" Psalm 68 is about the Lord's victory, and verse 18 mentions his plunder. Paul equates Jesus with the victorious Lord. We know that Jesus was victorious over sin, death and the devil. Jesus turned the devil's captives into freed people who belong to God and who bless the church.

These next two verses of the chapter, 11-12, are most important here for our study of spiritual gifts. Look at verse 11. “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers...” Jesus gave the church gifts. What did he give the church? He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. That includes many of you.

Jesus gave apostles. Who were the apostles? They were Jesus’ disciples who were the foundation of the church. They were the ones responsible for writing the New Testament in the Bible, which we hold in our hands today. Those who wrote the New Testament were either apostles chosen by Jesus himself, like Matthew, John, Peter, and Paul, or the writers were close companions of the apostles, like Mark, Luke, James and Jude. Thanks to the apostles we have the biographies of Jesus Christ—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John— and the teachings of the first Christians, who followed Jesus.

There is another meaning that Jesus gave apostles to the church. The word apostle means “sent one,” or, “missionary.” Thanks to the apostles, the word of God went out from Jerusalem all over the world to the north, south, east and west. Thanks to other missionaries, Korea was evangelized. From them, Korean missionaries went out. Some came to Chicago and started this church, and we are here today, including me, because of them.

Jesus also gave prophets. The Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah, foretold the coming of the Messiah. The prophets proclaimed the mind and will of God to the people of their time. Preachers of today who proclaim God’s word are similar to prophets. Prophets declare what God has done, what God is doing, and what God wants to do, not based on their own feelings or ideas, but based on God’s word and promises.

Jesus also gave evangelists. Evangelists are those who proclaim good news, the good news of God’s salvation. Evangelists help people who have never heard of Jesus Christ or who have never received him and believed in his name. Apostle John was a wonderful evangelist who wrote John’s gospel. He says he wrote his gospel so that we “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name” (Jn 20:31). People continue to have life in the name of Jesus Christ through the gospel that the Apostle and Evangelist John wrote. Do you have a heart to reach the lost with the good news of Christ, and do you share it with others? Then you have a gift of evangelism.

Jesus also gave shepherds and teachers. Shepherds watch over God’s flock to protect them from wild animals and thieves. Shepherds pay attention to the well-being of people: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Joseph in Genesis was a good

and faithful shepherd, even while he was in prison. He paid attention to the other prisoners and counseled them based on God's word.

Jesus also gave teachers. This is closely related to shepherding. Teachers teach God's word. God's word is the truth. God's word is bread to our souls. God's word gives life, light, wisdom, peace, and salvation in Jesus Christ. God's word is sharper than a double-edged sword, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Many of you God is raising up as shepherds and teachers of weak, vulnerable wandering souls, to lead them to our Good Shepherd and Teacher, Jesus.

Some of you might be thinking: I'm not a missionary, not a preacher, not an evangelist, not a shepherd, and not a teacher; so this passage is not for me. But it is for you. Look at verse 12. "...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..." Jesus gave to the church apostles, missionaries, prophets, preachers, evangelists, shepherds and teachers—not for them to show off or bring attention to themselves. Jesus gave them to the church for a purpose. What is the purpose? Paul tells us. It was to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Who are the saints? Here "saints" does not mean great Christians who have died. Paul uses the term "saints" frequently in his letters to refer to all Christians. Did you know that if you love and follow Jesus Christ, you are a saint? You might think: I don't feel like a saint. But if you follow Jesus, you are a saint. Saint means "holy one." You have been made holy by his grace. You have been set apart for God's sacred use to bless the church and the world. Of course, you are also a sinner, for you continue to sin. So you are a sinner and a saint at the same time. You are not "sinless," but hopefully you are "sinning less," year by year. You are a child of God, growing in the image and likeness of Jesus.

Paul says, "to equip the saints." What do you think of when you hear the word "equip"? I think of a soldier or a football player. They have equipment to fight and to compete. But here, Paul says equipped for work. So that is more like a carpenter who has tools to work and build a house.

We are all both equipping and being equipped by God. For what purpose? It is not to build a log cabin. Verse 12 tells us. It is "for the work of ministry." What is the work of ministry? Another word for ministry is service. You are being equipped and you are equipping others for service, that is, to serve God and to serve people, to love God and to love people.

Ministry involves tending to peoples' well-being holistically. That means caring for their bodies, their minds, their emotions and their spirits. There is a lot of work to be done in all of these areas. We need to help people to be strong and healthy in their bodies, in their minds, in their emotions and in their spirits. How are you helping others in these areas in their lives? God is equipping you and using you to equip others for the work of ministry, for the Lord's work in peoples' lives.

Why do we do this? Paul tells us again in verse 12: "for building up the body of Christ." P.David Won's last spiritual gifts message on Romans 8 was titled, "Spiritual Workout." We build our bodies by working out and exercising. We are equipped for the work of ministry to build up the body of Christ, to build up one another in the church, to love and serve our Lord Jesus and others in his name.

For how long should we do this and with what goal? Look at verse 13. "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..." The goal is to reach unity in faith and the knowledge of Jesus. This is true Christian maturity. The character of Jesus is our aim and goal. God is making us more and more like Jesus as we grow and mature in Christian faith and knowledge. We don't want to remain as children, tossed around by waves and winds of worldly, deceitful people.

Paul concludes this section (15-16): "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." In love. That's another repeated theme of Paul in this and in all of his letters. Love is the key. And this is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

So let me return to the opening questions. Are you thankful for the gifts that Christ has given the church: apostles, missionaries, prophets, preachers, evangelists, shepherds and teachers? We should be thankful for them. Next question: how is the Lord equipping you and equipping others in the church through you for the work of ministry? How are you building up the body of Christ? Remember Paul's charge in verses 2-3: "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Thanks be to Jesus Christ who has gifted the church and us for the work of ministry to serve Him and others. He is the head, and we are his body. We are his hands and feet in the world. Isn't that amazing! May God help us to do the work of ministry, serving Christ and others, and building up the body of Christ.